

The Devil's Daughter

The situation developed in this story between two of the characters—one a successful actress, the other an unsuccessful wife—is unfortunately only too common. The fact seems to be, nowadays, that more and more married people fail to consider married life a business. Success comes outside—not in the home. For example, do you think the wife gave a satisfactory answer to "Sonny" Day's question: "Why don't you society women keep your men?" Mrs. Woodrow has the talent of treating every-day human relations with the insight and appreciation which make you stop and think. Her stories are not only interesting, but bound to be helpful. She will henceforth be a regular contributor to *Cosmopolitan*.

By Mrs. Wilson Woodrow

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Illustrated by R. F. Schabelitz

BERTHA HAMPTON laid down a pen and turned from her desk as Preston Walters came in, but she was not writing; instead she was drawing pyramids and triangles and circles on the paper before her, a habit of hers when she was giving any matter concentrated thought.

Walters had been walking briskly, and he seemed to bring in with him something of the keen freshness of the autumn wind, his dark, intelligent, sensitive face reflecting the glow of the sunshine; but both expression and manner changed subtly but perceptibly as if the potent influence of Bertha's individuality and Bertha's atmosphere had the power to blur and neutralize all previous impressions.

And very restful, very soothing was the atmosphere of her sitting-room where a soft, dim twilight perpetually reigned, with its gray walls; its black carpet bordered with white; its few misty, cloudy landscapes on the walls, framed in black; its white, vellum-bound books, and its ebony-and-gray furniture. A background which made the few points of vivid color—the flicker of flame on the hearth, the light which fell in broken refractions through some old ruby glass, the ray of sunshine which shone through the thin petals of a bowl of yellow flowers—oddly disturbing to the senses, exotic, even poignant.

Bertha herself in her trailing gray crapes, as she slowly rose, seemed to have detached herself from the background which so marvelously expressed her. She had never cared

to picture herself either as a beautiful or joyous woman; these were qualities too obvious to appeal to her. She preferred to convey a suggestion of beauty rather than to flaunt the patent fact, to allow her charm to steal through her soft evasions and so capture and haunt the imagination.

"Bertha, what is it?" As she rose, Walters made a hasty step toward her and caught both her hands in his, looking anxiously down into her eyes.

It was more a matter of habit than any genuine concern of the moment, a sort of customary response to what he had been trained to believe that she expected of him, but as she lifted her violet, black-lashed eyes to his, he saw that their usual wistfulness was accentuated by some deeper emotion.

"What is it?" he repeated.

"Oh, not much more than usual," she drew her hands from his with a little sigh, "only I've just discovered that Billy is financing that woman in some new musical comedy. It isn't the most agreeable news in the world. I suppose everyone knows it. You do, of course."

He flushed. "I—I—" he began.

"I think," she said, with gentle distinctness, "that I have endured just about all that could be expected of me. Billy has no compunctions about being seen everywhere with her. They were dining together at the Plaza yesterday evening."

He rested his elbow on his knee and laid his cheek on his hand, his eyes studying the carpet; then, with a quick movement, he

stretched out the other hand and covered hers warmly for a moment.

"I know how awfully hard it is for you," the habitual note of tender sympathy noticeable in his voice when speaking to her deepened, "and how brave you've been, but what is there to do? Argument or expostulation always makes Billy more obstinate."

What he had said was true enough, and yet even in his passionate sympathy for Bertha and espousal of her cause, he felt a twinge of contrition at his criticism of his cousin. Hampton had stood by him more than once, and men, all the men he knew, swore by Billy.

"I'm past all that," she was twisting a long amethyst-and-silver chain about her fingers. "I—" she hesitated a moment as if debating with herself whether to confide in him or not, "I am going to see her."

He drew back dismayed. He knew something of the mild, inherent obstinacy of this cousin of his by marriage.

"Who? 'Sonny' Day? Bertha! You don't want to do that. Why, Billy would be all in the air over it, and she'd make capital of it, sure as fate. Tell it all around."

She shook her head with a little, grateful, sad smile.

"Dear boy," caressingly, "I've thought of every phase of the matter, and I am going to see this woman personally. You know me well enough to be sure that there will be no scenes."

"Oh, but it's out of the question; you mustn't, you mustn't!" He got up and began to walk hurriedly up and down the floor, his hands in his trousers pockets, his eyes on the ground. "Wait a few days; let me find out just how the land lies, how much truth, if any, there is in these reports, and how far Billy's infatuation goes. Good God!" impetuously, stopping in front of her, "think of having you, and then ever dreaming of even looking at another woman! Will you promise me, will you, Bertha, not to go to her until I look about a little? I promise you faithfully that you shall know the exact situation."

"Very well." Her almost incredibly long lashes lay on her cheeks, but now she slowly lifted her eyes to his. For a moment they gazed deeply into each other's eyes, and then she put her hands on his arms and shook him a little. "But I don't want you to get to know her. She seems a bit of a siren, even if a very vulgar one."

"Bertha! As if anyone who knows you, who appreciates you as I do —"

"Now, now, now," she lifted a reproving finger and shook it at him slightly, "you know that that is not allowed." But again she let her eyes rest lingeringly on his, in their soft depths the flicker of a sudden flame; and, as if in defiance, he caught both her hands in his and kissed them again and again.

When he had left her she still stood in the same spot, deeply cogitating something. In truth she was wondering if she had been quite wise in delegating this investigation to Preston instead of pursuing it herself. She came to the conclusion that she had.

"A man can always handle these things better and discover more than a woman," she reflected; and there were reasons, imperative reasons, which she had no intention of disclosing to Preston. just now, at least, why she must find out just how deeply both Billy's heart and his fortune were involved.

She only saw Walters once or twice during the next fortnight, but, as he explained to her over the telephone, several important and unexpected business matters had come up which demanded most of his time and attention, but he held her interests paramount, nevertheless, and hoped to have some definite information for her within a short time. Twice, also, he had stopped in late in the afternoon, and both times she was struck by the fact that he was a thought more brusque and offhand in his manner than she liked.

The attitude that she ever imposed upon her admirers was that of the adoring knight kneeling before his lovely and lofty lady, proffering fealty for aye; but, as she afterward remembered, there were other people about on both occasions, and since he had rather let himself go at their last meeting, this youth of high ideals had probably suffered agonies of remorse for having so openly shown his love for his cousin's wife. She permitted herself a fleeting, almost derisive smile at this reflection.

So matters stood when one morning she went down-town with her husband to a lawyer's office to sign some deeds and afterward, upon Billy's suggestion, she stopped at Sherry's to take luncheon with him. In the interval between the ordering of luncheon and its serving, she let her eyes rove idly around the room when, suddenly



"Who? 'Sonny' Day? Bertha! You don't want to do that. Why, Billy would be all in the air over it, and she'd make capital of it, sure as fate"

noticing that almost everyone present seemed to focus their interest upon one especial table, she put up her lorgnette and with an almost perceptible start realized that it was occupied by Preston Walters and Miss "Sonny" Day.

This newest star of musical comedy was noticeable in this room full of elaborately gowned women, for the simplicity, almost the carelessness of her appearance; but, as Bertha recognized with a pang, it was the careless simplicity of sophistication; that

well-worn blue-serge frock was not a product of her native city, Sacramento, but the blue serge of Madame Paquin.

For the rest, her face was pale, her cheekbones broad and rather flat, her eyes were long and very light, sometimes sea-green and sometimes sea-blue; in contrast, her hair was dark. As for her nose, it was ugly and *retroussé*, and her scarlet mouth curved upward like a crescent moon with deep dimples in the corners, and one in her chin.

She was the personality of the hour in

this great New York which loves its picturesque personalities. According to the critics when writing after the dictates of their consciences, she could neither sing nor dance nor act, but possessed to a superlative degree the art of "getting over." When they wrote after the dictates of their hearts, which was more frequently, they said other things, among them, that "Sonny" Day's laughter pealing through the house spread a contagion of youth; that her quaint awkwardness was more enchanting to the beholder than the most consummate grace; that even if her ear were defective and her singing-method execrable, her soft, husky contralto voice had power to thrill the heart-strings of every man in the audience.

Billy Hampton, noticing Bertha's absorption, turned his head following her gaze.

"By Jove!" he cried, "if there isn't old Preston and 'Sonny' Day. My word! He's arriving at last. Humph!" he turned rather irritably to the consumption of his food.

She stirred restlessly.

"I admire your self control. You seem to view them with equanimity," she said.

"Got to," he replied, with a shrug of his stout shoulders, a cynical smile showing for a moment under his mustache. He was typical of his class and of his manner of life. A man of middle height with an increasing tendency to stoutness, which it bored him very much to keep down by the prescribed exercises and limitations of diet, his face was broad and pink, his hair plastered and shining; but his nose, delicate and sharply pointed, showed alertness and penetration, as did his eyes. His expression, however, was frequently morose, although he was usually able to maintain an air suggestive of a humorous and tolerant attitude toward life. At present this was eclipsed; the moroseness was in the ascendent.

"It didn't take little 'Sonny' very long to rope and tie him," he said.

Bertha shivered slightly and then smiled in disdain of her husband's coarse stupidity. It would be impossible for him either to understand the nature of Preston's service to her or to appreciate it.

"Why, she isn't even pretty," she exclaimed, putting up her lorgnette and surveying the actress through it again.

"She is if she wants to make you think so," grinned her husband, over his artichoke.

"What is it you men see in her?" she wondered, as if she hadn't heard him.

"She's so screamingly alive for one thing," he said, "and then she's not afraid of being alive for another."

"Evidently not—nature in the wild state."

"Ever seen her on the stage?"

"Oh yes," indifferently, "and I think that I shall have to sit in a box, very much to the front of a box, the first night of this musical comedy, just to show my knowledge and approval of your latest—gold brick?"

He laughed; her waspish wit and insolent innuendo amused even while they stung.

"All your claws out, haven't you, Bertha? Well, 'Sonny' had better make short work of Preston; she's due at rehearsal now."

Then a sudden thought seemed to strike him, a thought which brought a quick, eagerly wistful light to his eyes.

"Why have you taken such a marked and special dislike to 'Sonny'?" he asked. "Honestly, Bertha, you haven't got the right idea in your head at all, at least as far as I'm concerned. Why, look here!" leaning across the table and speaking with an earnestness he rarely showed, "you don't suppose that we American men are satisfied simply to make money all the time? That's only half the game. More than anything else we want some intelligent outlet for spending our money; we get tired now and then of seeing it all go out in dress-makers' and jewelers' bills."

Bertha's eyes flashed, "And Miss Day is the intelligent outlet in this case?" She spoke with ironic sweetness.

"Oh, don't be a fool! What do you expect? I've got to have some interests in life outside of business. If we had anything like a home and children, why, I suppose things would have been different; but anyhow," here he laughed a little as if embarrassed at his pleasure in discovering his own unexpected gift, "I got interested in some of these dramatic leagues, and I found I had a real *flair*, a kind of a sixth sense for seeing a play right and knowing how to put it on properly. But Bertha's business that had shone in his voice now, "a man does with second bests unless he is denied him."

She stirred restlessly with weary impatience.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Billy! don't begin one of your tiresome, sentimental harangues on home and fireside and babes on the knee and all that kind of thing; they're more than I can stand."

She had turned so that the light fell full upon her, and Hampton suddenly muttered a low exclamation. "Good heavens!" leaning forward and staring with narrowed eyes, "that's some pendant you're wearing."

"Yes," she touched it lightly with her finger, "it's the only one of its kind, and I knew that if Miss Day once saw it you'd buy it for her, so I beat her to it." She fell into an occasional slanginess of speech with her husband, which she would never have permitted herself to indulge in before Preston.

He muttered something under his breath.

"As soon as you get your gloves on," he said shortly, "we'll go out to the car. You said you wanted to go home, and I want to get to this rehearsal."

As they were whirled through the streets, he sat in silence, a heavy frown on his brow, while she leaned back and viewed him with a slight, mocking amusement.

"I'm studying the effect of jealousy on your temperament, Billy," she remarked. "You really were quite cheerful until luncheon."

"Jealousy!" he repeated, with an ugly sneer. "Jealousy! If you want to know what's the matter with me, Bertha, it's your damned extravagance. I swear I don't know what we're coming to. That pendant! I know what it cost, a small fortune. But you never dreamed of consulting me about it; just went off and bought it, as I would a cigar, and the bills are sent to me. Lord! I'd like to know where I come in," he sneered again.

"Where do I come in on the money you spend on 'Sonny' Day?" she parried.

"I'm not spending any money on her personally," he said. "I'm investing it in her show, and I have every reason to expect a very handsome return on my outlay."

"Yes?" Her tone, with its upward inflection of mockery, its delicate ripples of unbelief, was maddening.

"Even if it were," his face was purple with rage, "I don't see what you'd have to say. God! You women have got a nerve. Marriage! That's a joke. You've spent my money like water; there isn't a solitary whim you haven't gratified, no matter how

things were with me. You've cost more than a racing-stable or a musical show a year; but you certainly have welched on the payment, Bertha, like every one of your kind. I've got to leave my money to a Chorus Girls' Home, as far as I can see, because you've set your face like a flint against having children. You've never even pretended to take an interest in anything that interested me—my love for you, when I had any, business, sport, anything else, always brought out the cheerful yawn. What your kind of woman is good for, I don't know. You're just parasites."

The car had stopped before their house.

"Thank heaven we're home!" she cried.

"And yet you say that I don't pay for the privilege of being your wife. Let me out!" imperiously.

He gave an order to the chauffeur, stepped back into the motor, slammed the door behind him, and was gone.

As for Bertha, she very soon threw off the resentment her husband's words had aroused in her. There was another matter which touched her more deeply and which, as soon as she was alone, assumed the ascendancy in her thoughts, and that was the possibility of Preston himself becoming really interested in "Sonny" Day. She bit her lip angrily at the remembrance of her stupidity in permitting him to undertake this commission for her. She had found out all she wanted to know from Billy; she should have realized that she could do so in the first place.

That woman! She couldn't get her out of her head. She might be vulgar—when Bertha disliked another woman, she fancied that she obliterated her, simply wiped her out of the picture, by calling her vulgar—but alas! that did not dispose of "Sonny" Day. She had made every other woman in that room seem colorless, look as if they were all poured out of the same button-mold; she alone had seemed individual, and she was so audaciously assured and was also, oh, worse than all, the pictured, talked-of personality of the moment.

With an unpleasant exclamation, Bertha kicked a footstool out of the way and began feverishly to walk up and down the room, but she was one of those rare women who had usually won in the game of life by patience; a waiting game was her final resource, and she had played it more than once in a masterly fashion.

Therefore, when Preston called a few days later early in the afternoon, she presently mentioned to him with an air of amusement that she had seen him lunching with Miss Day at Sherry's a few days before.

"Just what is her charm?" she asked, still with that air of languid amusement.

"Her charm!" he repeated hurriedly. "Oh, I don't know; couldn't say, just off-hand, you know." He was miserably aware that he was flushing deeply. "But look here, Bertha, about Billy—he really is the 'angel' of 'The Devil's Daughter,' but nobody thinks he's such a fool at that. You see Billy saw her in some little town out West, and from the minute he put his eyes on her, he knew she'd be a winner in New York, but he couldn't get any manager to see it the same way; they wouldn't put the money in 'The Devil's Daughter' that's needed to make it a first-class production, so Billy—"

"Offered himself a willing sacrifice," she interpolated, with soft sarcasm.

"But it's bound to win. Why, look at her even in this sketch she's in, which isn't any vehicle for her at all; she's taken the town by storm." Something in her glance of mingled mockery and reproach caused him again to flush deeply and blunder on. "And I don't believe that Billy's affections are as much involved as you fear. I know that she doesn't—"

She suppressed a desire to tell him that he knew a great deal on a very intimate topic in a very short time; instead, she interrupted him with:

"Don't bother to assure me of the healthy state of Billy's affections; it's the state of his finances that interests me. Our income is not what it was, owing to various ventures, usually of this nature, before. Oh, Preston, it has been so hard, so hard—" She broke off with a pathetic little sigh.

He knew well enough from past experience what was expected of him; that he should take her hands and press them and murmur consolations in her ear, but he couldn't. Poor Bertha! She was a dear, and he was awfully sorry for her; she had had no end to bear from Billy, and she had always been so sweet about it, but—

He could not analyze his emotions; but he knew dimly that he had been enormously flattered that a woman of her charm should have chosen him from a host of admirers as the one to administer consolation; and he

had been frightened and shocked, and at the same time secretly thrilled, at the thought of his being on the very edge of an intrigue with his cousin's wife. Although of course she, pale, lovely creature, had never realized how near to passion was his feeling for her.

But now, the enervating, disturbing atmosphere of Bertha's twilight room with its isolated, sensuous tones of passionate color stifled him, and the soft, dominant, compelling influence that she always exerted over him—those fluttering, white hands that he always felt he must still in his own strong clasp; those sad little sighs which drew him to his knees beside her to wipe the tears which trembled on those long lashes away with his own handkerchief; those veiled glances with their undertones of flame which struck ardor from him as steel strikes sparks from flint—these, instead of drawing him, now vaguely annoyed and repelled him. He was a man whose intellectual development was in advance of his emotional; but now, slowly yet certainly, he was becoming aware of himself, of his own capacity for love, and he instinctively resented the intrusion of lesser and baser feelings.

But during that call Bertha's original desire for a personal interview had again asserted itself and hardened to determination, and upon a resolve once definitely formed in her mind, she never hesitated to act.

Consequently, the next morning, when Miss "Sonny" Day sat discussing certain eleventh-hour changes to be made in "The Devil's Daughter" with her "angel," her morning mail, which included a note from Mrs. Hampton, was brought in to her by her maid.

Miss Day, a pleasing picture in the trimmest of white morning frocks, might have posed for moving pictures as a young girl in a convent, if it had not been for the touch of incongruity in her costume, which was one of her pet mannerisms. Just now, she wore with her tailored, trotter gown, a pink silk-and-lace breakfast-cap, while her feet were thrust into violet-satin mules. Her breakfast was on a silver tray on the table beside her. On the other side of the table, Billy Hampton sat turning over the script of "The Devil's Daughter," an absorbed expression on his face.

Now it so happened that the maid brought in the letters at the psychological moment



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She let her eyes rove idly around the room when, suddenly noticing that almost everyone present seemed to focus their interest upon one especial table, she realized that it was occupied by Preston Walters and Miss "Sonny" Day

when Miss Day happened to be buttering a piece of toast. Therefore she said:

"Look over those letters, will you, Billy, and sift the chaff from the wheat? That's poetry for sift the bills from the invitations, and toss the wheat over to me."

Perfunctorily Hampton obeyed her, running rapidly over the letters. Suddenly he paused and carefully scrutinized the handwriting on a note before him.

"Look here, Sonny," he said; "here's a note from my wife. Now what on earth—"

She took it hastily from him and tore it open.

"It surely is from your wife," she said, as she ran her eyes down the page. "She says she's coming to see me this morning. Oh, my! troubles do not come singly; just when I'm rehearsing every minute and frazzled to a burned fritter! This note is as cold as a hailstorm and as ominous as a tornado. I wish I was back West again. It would be amusing if you were to be here when she comes. Like that, wouldn't you, Billy?"

"Billy wouldn't," was his prompt response. "But why is she—" He evidently gave up the puzzle and sat shaking his head and wondering.

Miss Day was annoyed and showed it. "Why don't you keep your wife in order?" She spoke querulously, in her soft, Southwestern drawl.

"Like to hear of any fellow who ever did," he growled. "I could go and try to head her off, but it would only end in a row and she'd come, anyway."

"She doesn't even ask for an appointment; just announces that she is coming to-day at twelve, and Milbrand, my dressmaker, will be here at eleven, and it's that now," glancing at a clock on the mantelpiece. "Billy, you'll have to clear out."

"And these changes still to be made, and every minute counts now. Take the advice of one who knows and don't see her."

She crinkled her nose and twisted her mouth in what the dramatic critics called one of her bewitching characteristic *moues*.

"Then she'll come to-morrow; you know a lot about women."

Madame Milbrand was announced at this moment, and Hampton, with an apprehensive glance at the clock, made haste to depart.

The sitting-room, therefore, was quite empty when Bertha arrived, sufficiently

near the hour she had mentioned, at the actress' hotel, and was conducted to her suite of apartments. Mrs. Hampton gazed about her curiously; the room was so filled with flowers that she raised her eyebrows and murmured under her breath, "I wonder what Billy's florist bill is now?" The large piano, which stood open, was covered with music and pictures and books and flowers; so was the mantelpiece; so were the two or three tables.

After it seemed to her that she had waited an unconscionable time, a door was pushed open and Miss Day entered. Bertha rose with the faintest of frozen smiles on her lips, but her drawing-room grace and poise did not disconcert the other woman; hers were learned in wider schools, nature and then the stage.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said. "I hope my maid explained the circumstances to you."

"Yes," returned Bertha, with her usual, languid self-possession, the frozen smile still on her lips, "but I am afraid I shall have more difficulty in explaining my intrusion. Let us put it down to interest in the personality which my husband and my cousin have both found so attractive."

"Oh," drawled Miss Day, "curiosity. Couldn't you gratify that from the audience?" The softness of her tones removed the suggestion of rudeness from the words.

"Not entirely curiosity," returned Bertha smoothly. "Interest is the better word. Knowing both men as well as I do, I realized that it must be an unusual woman who could stir them to admiration."

"Sonny" looked at her with her wide, engaging, painted smile; then she threw both palms upward and outward, brought them together again, and rested her chin on them.

"Corking dialogue we're passing back and forth," she smiled mischievously, and spoke as if she were taking Mrs. Hampton quite into her confidence, "but we'll have to cut it, if you don't mind. Time is money to me. I've got a long rehearsal this afternoon."

Bertha did not reply immediately, but continued to regard the actress as if she were some new specimen of butterfly glued to a card, and seeing this, "Sonny" grinned like a street gamin.

"What's the use?" she said. "It's splendid stage business and all that, but I really haven't the time."



"Look here, Sonny," he said; "here's a note from my wife. Now what on earth—"

Bertha knew how to discard her well-bred indirections as well as anyone when necessary.

"Then to be quite frank," she said, "I have come to see you so that I may the better decide how to order my future. It really isn't pleasant for a woman of any pride to know that her husband's infatuation for a well-known actress is on everyone's tongue."

"Sonny" regarded her thoughtfully.

"I suppose that's true," she said. "It can't be exactly agreeable, but"—there was both wonder and protest in her voice—"why the dickens don't you society women keep your men?"

Bertha laughed shortly, bitterly.

"You actresses underrate your attractions, if you ask us that," she said.

Miss Day pinched her lip thoughtfully. Then she looked up quickly.

"That's not it," she spoke with that penetrating acuteness, that faculty for going to the heart of things, which was one of her most striking characteristics. "To come down to cases: I chose the stage for my profession; you chose marriage for yours. I'm wondering now if you ever put a third of the time and the thought into making a success of your profession that I've put into mine. I guess it's a question, after all, of what you've got to give, just like anything else. My audiences would fade away like your husbands if I didn't give them all

there is in me, every day, over the footlights."

Bertha shook her head.

"I've seen women give their whole hearts, whole lives to their husbands and be utterly ignored—and worse, after the first few months."

"Maybe her whole heart wasn't what her husband wanted. She wasn't making good in her profession. He might have preferred cooking, or intellectual tastes, or good clothes; you can't tell. Gee! It's not easy to meet the demands of your profession, but all the fun there is in life is—just—meeting—it. Now I was born laughing. Well, that's what they demand of me. There are times when I'd like to cry, but I don't ever dare even think of myself that way. What they want is the joy of me, the me that laughs. So I give it to them. I splash it at 'em, I dance it at them, I sing it at them; I hand the me-ness of me over the footlights in chunks."

"Yes?" again that insolent, upward inflection, "but since you have so little time—as I told you, I want to order my future with some dignity, so, since my husband has made no secret of his inclinations, I would like to know what you are going to do?"

"Just what I am doing, I expect," Miss Day answered crisply.

Bertha rose frigidly.

"That being the case, I need no longer keep you from your engagements."

"Hold on a minute," the girl's voice arrested her. "About your husband—I don't want him. The poor, bored soul really has a gift for knowing a good play when he sees one, and he's got a real taste for stage management. He's surely been a lot of help to me; goodness knows I needed an 'angel'! But—in a nearer and dearer way, I don't see him. As for your cousin,"—she jumped up, resting her hands on the table and leaning toward Bertha; she was flushed and more audacious than ever. "I think I'll keep him now I've found him. He came to rescue Billy in the first place, and then he saw that there was nothing to that; so now it's me," her voice bubbled with exultation, "it's me that he likes."

"You! Never!" The words came involuntarily, explosively. The scarlet showed in two vivid patches on Bertha's cheekbones, the hand with which she pulled her furs about her trembled. "Preston is a

very unusual character," she said, as if she were merely speaking to gain time for thought, "high souled—"

"So he is," agreed "Sonny" Day cheerfully. "So much so that if I didn't have the energy and good-will to do a little rescue work for him, he'd be in sad danger of being a high-brow prig."

Bertha had regained her self-control.

"Don't you think," she said, with her customary smoothness, "that from the standpoint of cold business you are making a mistake? Of course my husband is in love with you; men don't play the part of 'angels' unless they are, as you probably know better than I do; but my husband's cousin has no fortune, nothing but what he makes, and as he is a young man working his way up, he could not possibly be of any help to you in your profession. And—when my husband discovers your interest in his cousin, he will, naturally, be very jealous and very angry. My dear young lady, what are you thinking of?"

"It's not very hard," said "Sonny," leaning still further over the table and speaking deliberately, her eyes fixed steadily on Bertha's face, "to guess which man you came to rescue. Now," she tapped the table emphatically, "I mean to know why."

Bertha looked back at her as steadily, her delicate, beautiful head held regally high.

"Every reason," she said, a faint, shameless, cynical smile on her lips. "Every reason."

"I don't believe it," cried the actress with a gesture of passionate protest. "He's decent, he's clean, but you're the devil's daughter, if I ever saw her."

But Bertha had already trailed her sinuous, silky gown to the door and now, with the merest of nods, she slipped through and was gone.

It was not from idle curiosity that she had glanced more than once at the clock on Miss Day's mantelpiece. She knew that that young woman had no time to see Preston before this important rehearsal at which she was already overdue, so Mrs. Hampton hastened to make an appointment with him for that afternoon, driving to the nearest hotel to telephone, instead of waiting until she reached home.

"I must see you on a really important matter," she said, "so come early, long before the tea hour."

Before he arrived, she was convinced that she had herself so well in hand that she could hold the control of any situation which might arise, but when she saw him and apprehended the subtle, unmistakable impress upon him of another and more potent influence, realized that he was no longer hers to sway and bend, her heart contracted with a pang so intense that it was with difficulty that she repressed her feelings. She did, however, grow very pale, and Preston seeing it, fell into his old habit of solicitude.

"Bertha!" he cried, taking both her hands in his, but, as she noticed bitterly, almost unconsciously and quite without the old, warm, personal pressure, "what is it, dear?" With equal unconsciousness he had slipped into the old form of words.

"I'm frightfully bothered, Preston." Her head drooped; the wistful, sad, little note of appeal that had always touched him trembled in her voice.

All about her were the shadows of her subtle, twilight room, standing among those shadows, her gown of diaphanous blues and greens had seemed as subdued and colorless in effect as the surroundings, but now that she had sunk into a chair by the fire, the veering tongues of flame brought out vivid tones of emerald and ultramarine blue in her gauzes and blazed in the sapphires that dropped against her throat.

"I went to see that actress, that Day woman," she went on, before he could speak. "When?" he cried. "To-day?" His face had flushed; his eyes had taken on a new light. "And didn't you like her? She's wonderful, you know. Why, Bertha, if you knew all the things she's worked through, her pluck and—"

"Ah, don't, don't," she cried, in a stifled voice, her head bent on her arm. "Oh, my poor boy, I can't bear to hear you go on like that. Of course she's wonderful! I admit it. She can't sing, she can't act, and yet she's a tremendous hit. It's to be expected that Billy and his kind should go down

before her; but you, you—oh, no," as he would have interrupted her, "it's only natural that you, that any young man, would be taken in by her cheap air, her odd good looks, her queer, little mannerisms; she's the sensation of the minute, and it's only natural that you should be flattered, but you mustn't be taken in by her, you mustn't. Why, Preston, you've built up a creature of your imagination to admire, the woman herself is common and vulgar—and worse."

"Oh," as he again interrupted her with a vehement protest, "she could not deceive a woman; she didn't try to. Why, Preston, you know that men like Billy

are not playing 'angels' to unusual and fascinating young women—for nothing."

"Bertha!" He was vehement; he had risen and stood before her. "You are so prejudiced you haven't seen her right. You are all wrong and terribly unjust, and for once you are making a mistake about Billy."

"Billy!" she cried. "Oh, what do I care about Billy! Long, long before you came into my life, I'd ceased to care about Billy. It is you I am thinking of. It would be just like you to marry that creature. It is too much. Our companionship has been so beautiful. Oh, I shall never forgive myself for sending you to her!"

Her grief was so real that his anger died as he saw her lie there in her chair, her whole figure shaken with heavy sobs.



Bertha stopped, waiting, listening, until she heard the closing of the front door

"Bertha," he said gently, "I can't bear to see you make yourself unhappy; when you know her better—when you understand about Billy—"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, stop harping on Billy." She rose, swayed a moment, and then leaned against him. "Oh Preston," she threw her arms about him and pressed close, close to him. "It is you I love, you. And you love me. Your interest in her is a mere passing thing of the moment. Kiss me, Preston, kiss me, and forget her." Her head lay against his arm, her lips glowed scarlet in her pale face and her eyes, veiled and soft no longer, burned like her sapphires with the fire-flame on them.

He was breathing hard; his pulses were beating in his ears; he tore his eyes from her face, and they fell upon her arm flung across him, her white, slender arm with its sensuous jade bracelets, and he was overwhelmingly conscious of a mad impulse to cover it with kisses. He knew instinctively that she was exerting all of her influence, her soft, compelling, irresistible influence to which he had always been susceptible, and he was afraid, horribly afraid. His arm tightened, almost involuntarily it seemed to him, and he held her cruelly close; and she, thinking that she had won, began to speak again.

"You couldn't have left me, Preston, you couldn't. The only interest I took in Billy in this matter was that he shouldn't waste a fortune on her. We couldn't possibly live on what you make and so I wanted to be sure of big settlements, and I couldn't force decent alimony from Billy unless I threatened to name her as correspondent, or did actually name her."

His arms dropped slackly from her. He stepped back from her, looking unbelievably at her; the lines of his face looked as if they had been graven in with a tool; there was horror in his glance. "My God, Bertha! Is that what is in your heart?" He took out his handkerchief and mopped the sweat from his face; his hand was trembling. "I'm weak, rotten, I guess, but Billy's always been mighty good to me. I wouldn't—I couldn't have taken his wife. No," as she would have thrown her arms around him again, "that minute of madness is over. It isn't any use for us to talk any more. I'm going now."

And he went, without a glance, without good-by.

Bertha ran toward the door, and then stopped, waiting, listening, until she heard the closing of the front door. Then she took a staggering step or two and fell in a huddle on a sofa.

There Billy found her when he came in an hour or two later, the only light in the room the faint, dull gleams of the dying fire.

"What's the matter, Bertha?" he cried. "Why are you lying here all alone? Got a headache?"

She nodded, rising wearily to a sitting position.

"Too bad." He sat down beside her, and there was something in his tone, a gentleness, a tenderness that she had not heard there for a long time. "Look here, Bertha," he went on, "I happened to be at 'Sonny' Day's to-day when your note came, and I've been thinking about it every minute since. I had an idea that you'd long ago given up caring what I did or where I went, but you must have cared, you must have been a little jealous if you went to see her to-day." He slipped his arm around her waist. "And look here, I've been thinking a lot this afternoon; you see I like little 'Sonny' and believe in her, but I don't care for her the way you think. I've got a born knack for selecting and staging a play properly, and 'Sonny's' a sure winner; but," he drew her nearer, "you can call me a fool or anything else you like, but I've never loved any woman as I have you, Bertha."

He drew her nearer still; she shivered all over and let her head fall inertly on his shoulder.

"We'll have another honeymoon, won't we?" His lips brushed her cheek; she gave one deep, shuddering sigh, and her teeth almost bit through her lip, but she forced a nod.

"And perhaps, now I'm sure that you really care for me, you won't mind a kiddie or so." Again that deep shudder, but he was not an observant person. "And when shall we start around the world?" buoyantly, boyishly. "To-morrow?"

"Oh, not for a month or so." Her voice was listless, weak. "I've no end of engagements, and I'm right in the thick of establishing these homes for working girls so the poor things won't have to lead immoral lives; the whole thing is literally on my shoulders."